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EAST TIMOR

BISHOP BELO RECEIVES THE 1995 JOHN HUMPHREY HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

On 10 December, the Montreal-based International Centre for Human Rights and Development awarded its 1995 John Humphrey Freedom Award to Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, the apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Dili in East Timor. The award is a recognition of Bishop Belo's outstanding courage in defending the Timorese people and his commitment to promoting human rights in East Timor. Part of the award is a grant of $30,000 for Bishop Belo's work. Unfortunately, the escalating disturbances around the time of the 20th anniversary of Indonesian invasion (7 December) prevented Bishop Belo from leaving East Timor. Rev. Matheus do Rosario da Cruz, chair of the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, accepted the award on his behalf. The nomination of Bishop Belo for the award was made by CAWG, endorsed by Canadian church leaders.

Bishop Belo, at 47, is one of the Catholic church's youngest bishops. In 1983, just 3 years after his ordination as priest, he was appointed a bishop. Indonesian authorities, who exerted a lot of pressure for the removal of his predecessor, the outspoken Bishop Lopez de Cruz, found him an acceptable choice, for he was not a known human rights advocate. But his profound sense of responsibility and pastoral care for his people became immediately evident. In his first year, he wrote a report on abuses committed by Indonesian soldiers against the Timorese people. This was followed by a pastoral letter which condemned the forced sterilization of Timorese women and implied that this was part of the Indonesian birth control programme. In 1989, he sent a letter to the United Nations Secretary General calling for a referendum on East Timor.

As expected, the Indonesian authorities were not pleased.

There have been attempts by Indonesian authorities to persuade the Vatican to make the diocese of Dili a part of the Indonesian Catholic church. There were also talk that Indonesia wanted the diocese of Dili divided, to weaken Bishop Belo's influence on the people. So far there has been no action on the part of the Vatican. Bishop Belo also became the target of attacks, including threats of assassination, harassment, "black" propaganda, etc. In fact, the Catholic church in East Timor is under increasing attack by the military and its agents.

Despite the risks to his life and safety, Bishop Belo's commitment has not wavered. His home has often been a sanctuary for young Timorese seeking refuge from Indonesian security forces. When there are protest demonstrations, he is there urging Indonesian authorities to respect the right of the people to peacefully voice their opinions, to demand and try to ensure that their human rights are respected or to personally escort the young people to safety. He has become increasingly outspoken, at home and during his visits overseas, about the situation in East Timor and Indonesian policies, such as encouraging the migration of Indonesians to East Timor, continuing high profile military presence and excessive surveillance of the civilian population, that threaten the welfare of the Timorese and spark popular unrest.

Bishop Belo has always insisted that the church's role is not to be involved in partisan politics but to ensure that the dignity and rights of the Timorese as human beings and Christians are being respected and to contribute to their full development. But as the only institution that has stood in defense of the Timorese people over the years, the Catholic church has become the focal point of the Timorese resistance to Indonesia. The steady number of East Timorese joining the Catholic church, so that about 90% of the population are now Catholics, and the fact that the Timorese cultural identity has become intimately linked to their religion, are a testimony to the solidarity that has been forged between the Catholic church and the Timorese people. And Bishop Belo has played a key role in this.

CANADA PROTESTS INDONESIAN ENVOY'S ATTEMPT TO INTIMIDATE REFUGEE

In January, Canadians witnessed first hand the oppressive control that the Indonesian government is imposing on the people of East Timor. Isabel Galhos, an outspoken Timorese refugee residing in Ottawa, reported that the Indonesian ambassador to Canada, Benjamin Parwoto, paid a visit to her family in Dili, which they described as very intimidating and left them fearful for their safety. "I was not directly threatened by the ambassador, but I felt terrified by so many people with cars, radios and uniforms who were with him," the mother of Galhos later told a Canadian reporter.

Parwoto has insisted that his visit was a social call. But Galhos insists that it was meant to intimidate her into silence. Canada's Foreign Affairs department agreed with her. "The Canadian government was not happy with his (Parwoto) visit to Mrs. Galhos which has been interpreted as an attempt to intimidate a resident in Canada through her family in East Timor," said Foreign Affairs spokesperson Colin Stewart. In a rare move, Canada issued a diplomatic protest to the ambassador warning him that "his actions were inappropriate and unacceptable."

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VATICAN OFFICIAL VISITS EAST TIMOR

Statement of Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, On Leaving Dili

(Bishop Belo and the Catholic community in East Timor recently got a most propitious show of support from the Vatican. Last month, the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, visited the territory. His public statement, which he read at the airport before leaving Dili, centred on the situation and suffering in East Timor. He emphasized the theme of peace with justice and the respect for human rights as the only way to achieve this goal. Obviously, the Cardinal saw and was particularly concerned by the desperate situation of Timorese youths. He specifically mentions them, in his call that space be given so that the people of Timor can express their concerns. Below is the full text of the Cardinal's statement)

It was a great joy for me to be able to accept the invitation of His Excellency Bishop Belo to visit the diocese of Dili. I have been here in these days on a pastoral visit, first of all to bring the blessings and encouragement of the Holy Father to the Apostolic Administrator, to all his priests, to the religious and to all the members of the Catholic community. In the spirit of harmony which should exist everywhere between members of the different faiths and religions, I extend my greetings also to the members of all other religious communities.

Some foreign news sources attributed to my visit the task of examining the possible division of the diocese of Dili. I wish to make clear that I have received no mission of this nature.

As President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I wish to reaffirm my conviction that there can be no justice without peace and that there can be no peace without justice. Respect for human rights is the only way in which justice and peace can be brought to live together. If these principles had always been respected in history, many lives would have been saved, much suffering and many tears would have been spared everywhere.

I am aware that an international political problem exists concerning East Timor. It is not my competence to enter into that question. As a friend, however, I wish to say to all those involved: believe in the power of dialogue, of dialogue among yourselves and of dialogue outside the country. And I express my complete encouragement, as the Pope himself has done on numerous occasions, for all the efforts of dialogue at present. Dialogue is difficult; it requires courage, patience and determination. Dialogue requires mutual respect and understanding by all the parts. It requires giving a space to all, especially to young people, to express their concerns. The way to dialogue is the most mature and the most human way, and it is the most effective way for producing solutions which satisfy all concerned.

In such a dialogue there must be space for the realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Timorese people to see their special culture and religious identity recognized. With the Pope, I wish today to launch an appeal for courage to all friends and servants of peace.

Signed: Roger Cardinal Etchegaray,
Dili, 27 February 1996

A Timorese priest wrote this following commentary on the Cardinal's visit. "This visit by Cardinal Etchegaray was a real comfort, in the way in which he represented the attention of the Universal Church to the suffering of the East Timorese people, to the Bishop, the Priests and the Religious. We felt also that all the people working for Justice and Peace, the Justice and Peace Commissions of all the world, as well as all the other organizations, such as Caritas, were joined with us.

The big embrace extended to Monsignor Belo by the Cardinal on Sunday afternoon in the Cathedral was historic for us, because it was a huge sign of recognition, on the part of the church, of the work and the growing risks of our own lives, in seeking to raise our heads in this martyred country. At the end of the ceremony in the Cathedral, there were youths recruited by the Indonesians who began to throw stones at the youths in the Cathedral yard, but there were no serious problems. What was clear was that it was the Indonesians who are in the habit of orchestrating disturbances so as to be able to capture the youth. Witnesses of this were the Vicar General and parish priest of the Cathedral, based on eye witness reports of Fr. Domingos Sequeira. The two went, the following day to ask for an explanation from the Chief of Police of the province at Polwil.

The visit to the Santa Cruz cemetery, where he prayed for the victims of the 12 November (1991), was equally a great sign for the resistance of the East Timorese people.

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Parwoto reportedly urged the mother of Galhos to convince her daughter to return to East Timor because her activities have embarrassed Indonesia and destroyed its good image. Galhos has strongly criticized the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. She has travelled across Canada, speaking about her personal experiences and those of her family and friends, of the violence being perpetrated by the Indonesian government against the Timorese people. She has also criticized Canada for maintaining friendly relations with the Indonesian government. During the January trade mission to Asia, by Prime Minister Jean Chretien and 'Team Canada', Indonesia's human rights record was intensely scrutinized by the media. Galhos' story and testimony received a lot of attention. Parwoto, who had accompanied Team Canada on their visit to Indonesia, was in Dili visiting the Galhos family two days after the Team left Jakarta.

Galhos continues to fear for her family. A few days after Parwoto's visit, her uncle was attacked by another Timorese who was later seen at a police station. According to Indonesian authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the attack was not related to Parwoto's visit. Still for Galhos, it was a worrisome coincidence, and especially after a comment made by the ambassador that the safety of her mother "could be threatened by East Timorese who support Indonesia and would not like the activism of her daughter. My concern, if you make too much fuss abou t it here," the ambassador told the Toronto Star, "I'm concerned (for Galhos' mother); you never know, it's getting hot... there may be some people who may have sympathy, others may have antipathy."

Indonesia's tactic of using Timorese to fight other Timorese is not new. About two years ago, hooded *ninja gangs* sowed terror in Dili and other parts of East Timor, targeting for attack supporters of East Timor's independence. Since last year, violence during demonstrations by young Timorese often have been provoked by stone-throwing young people who were later found out to have come from the ranks of the military and police.

The Canadian government deserves to be commended for standing up to the Indonesian government in defense of the right of Galhos. Unfortunately, officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs now seem to be taking the line peddled by Parwoto. According to Galhos, recent letters by these officials imply that her activities in Canada are causing the undue attention given to her family in Dili and the consequent threat to their security.

INDONESIA

GOLD FIND SPARKS SPECULATIVE FEVER IN CANADA

"It's a frenzy out there. The whole populace is inflamed with the idea that people have made 50 times or 70 times their money..." This is how one Canadian businessman described the speculative fever that gripped Canadian stock exchanges in February. One broker reportedly saw the value of his stocks soar from $1 million a year ago to $60 million; another has now $800,000 worth of stock from her 5,000 shares bought for less than $1 each. At the centre of the action was Bre-X Minerals Ltd of Calgary, whose share price soared from $1.90 a year ago to as much as $170, following reports that it has struck what probably is the world's biggest gold mine in the Busang area in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The size of the mine is estimated as ranging from 30 million ounces to as much as 60 million. Bre-X's value is now estimated at $2.7 billion.

It was striking that, amid the excitement, nothing was said about the people of Kalimantan, no word on whether the rights of the traditional owners of the land were being infringed. What the February speculative fever showed were Canadians hawking the jungles of Kalimantan, patch by patch, as if the people there did not exist.

Kalimantan is the third largest island in the world. The northern section forms part of Malaysia and Brunei, while the southern 73% is administered by Indonesia. Most of the indigenous peoples in the area still lead traditional lives, that have been shown as a very sustainable and skilled management of forest resources. But in the last 20 years, they have faced immense pressure for their land's rich natural resources - timber, oil, coal, minerals. Without their knowledge, let alone their consent, the government has been parcelling out their land to Indonesian and foreign investors, among them Canadians. As a result, over half of their forests, covering about 27 million hectares, have been destroyed. At the same time, migrants from Java have been brought in to work in the mines and logging companies. This has led to the indigenous peoples being forced out of their lands and their way of life shattered. Resettled in unfamiliar lands and forced into unfamiliar agricultural systems, they end up not only feeling lost but also suffering from starvation.

Gold mining projects in Kalimantan have been accompanied by conflicts with local communities over issues of land rights, compensation and environmental degradation. An Australian owned company, PT KEM is being challenged by some 400 indigenous families who have rejected the meagre compensation they have been offered. It is also held responsible for the death of as many as 13 people,